

"Before you abuse, criticise and accuse, walk a mile in my shoes."
(American singer/songwriter Joe South, 1969)

A day in the shoes of ...



The city can be an unfriendly place at the best of times. Imagine then, how it might feel for the elderly or the homeless – people who are often marginalised by the rest of society. So to find out what it's really like to be in someone else's shoes, two reporters went undercover, one as an eighty-year-old and another as a homeless person. The results were eye-opening!

...an elderly lady by Tracy Bond

Turning 25-year-old me into an 80-year-old was no easy task; with the help of a make-up artist, I had to be covered with layers of prosthetic make-up. After putting on a shabby coat and holding tightly onto a walking stick, my transformation was complete – and very convincing! Then it was time to set out to see how the world would react.

Making sure that my voice sounded old and weak, I immediately tried to make small talk on the bus with the young woman sitting next to me. She stared straight ahead. She might not have heard, I thought. I tried again, but it was quite clear that the woman didn't want to talk to a chatty senior citizen. Then it was time for some shopping. At my favourite make-up counter, where the assistant usually laughs and jokes with me, she looked as if she couldn't wait to get rid of me. Later, in a music shop, my request for some CDs was met with laughter from sales assistants who couldn't believe an 80-year-old was interested in the latest chart hits! I felt incredibly embarrassed and lonely, as if nothing about me was important, except that I was old! All day, only one person seemed to want to chat to me – a homeless man, he too was invisible and unwanted by society.

As I finally took my make-up off, I couldn't help wondering how I would have treated 80-year-old me. Over the next 50 years, the number of elderly people in society will triple. Remember that the next time you're out and about and come across an elderly person. One day, it could be you!



Look at the people in the pictures in the text. What can a typical day in their lives be like?

Listen and read to find out.

...a homeless man by Sam Browne

Carrying a sleeping bag and wearing scruffy clothes, I headed for the spacious shop doorways where the homeless spend their nights. When I arrived there, I was shocked to see men and women already curled up in most of the doorways. I got into my sleeping bag in the large, well-lit doorway of a boutique, but I couldn't sleep. It wasn't just the biting cold, but I was constantly aware of people walking close to my head and the hard stone floor dug into my shoulder and hip. I finally dozed off, only to be woken up at about 5 am by the cleaners who arrived to wash the steps.

As I walked, people avoided looking at me and crossed the road. I walked into a café to use the toilet and I was angrily told I had to leave. At the public toilets I couldn't believe the reflection I saw in the mirror. My eyes were red and puffy, my skin pale and my hair was frizzy. I looked terrible.

Later, at a soup kitchen, I got a free hot meal and I spoke to people who were on the streets because of terrible debts or family break-ups. 19-year-old Rob told me that he couldn't get off the streets because he had no official identity. I suddenly remembered how many times I had walked past young homeless people and thought, "You should just get a job!" forgetting that you can't be employed without an address and ID.

My day as a homeless person has taught me how much the homeless need our help, not our judgment. These days, I donate money to a homeless charity and volunteer at a soup kitchen. Maybe you could do the same.

Check these words

abuse, criticise, accuse, marginalised, go undercover, eye-opening, prosthetic make-up, shabby, walking stick, convincing, set out, make small talk, chatty, senior citizen, get rid of, embarrassed, invisible, scruffy clothes, curled up, dig into, doze off, puffy eyes, frizzy hair, debt, family break-up, judgment, donate



Check these words

abuse (v):	to secretly get information through disguising yourself as sb else
criticise (v):	to start a journey /course of action
accuse (v):	talkative
marginalised (adj):	scruffy, worn
go undercover (phr):	to treat sb cruelly & violently
eye-opening (adj):	to tell sb that you think they did sth wrong
prosthetic make-up (phr):	surprising
shabby (adj):	make-up that includes false body parts
walking stick (n):	believable
convincing (adj):	a wooden stick that people lean on to help them walk
set out (phr v):	to make conversation on trivial topics e.g. the weather
<i>make small talk</i> (phr):	to express your disapproval of sb
chatty (adj):	made to feel isolated and unimportant by a society

Check these words

senior citizen (n):

family split up /separation

get rid of (phr v):

a person over 60

embarrassed (adj):

to make sb leave because you find him annoying

invisible (adj):

shy or ashamed about sth

scruffy clothes (phr):

negative opinion of sb / sth

curl up (phr v):

feeling ignored

dig into (phr v):

be in a position where your arms and legs are pulled in to the body

doze off (phr v):

puffy eyes (phr):

to give money or goods to sb or charity

frizzy hair (phr):

dirty, untidy clothes

debt (n):

money that is owed to sb

family break-up (phr):

to press sth hard in to sth else

judgment (n):

swollen eyes

donate (v):

hair that is wild and tightly curled

to fall asleep, esp during the day